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ABSTRACT

Maintaining that the development of a detailed communication plan well in advance of school collective bargaining negotiations will be a critical ingredient in the success of school districts' bargaining efforts, this handbook concentrates on communication before, during, and after the bargaining process, rather than on explicit bargaining techniques. The publication is designed to provide school administrators, board of education members, communication specialists, and concerned educational leaders with practical ideas and techniques for rebuilding the teacher-administrator team after a strike and for achieving school labor peace. Two detailed plans (for use at the district and building levels) are presented for communication before, during, and after negotiations. New systems of negotiation such as the "collective gaining" process used in the Forest Park (Illinois) Public Schools, and the "integrative bargaining" method used in the Livermore (California) Unified School District, are explored in depth. Frequent checklists and examples from actual practice presented throughout the publication offer communication guidelines. Topics discussed include communicating with school personnel, students, parents, the community, and the media; establishing a communication center; and clarifying the responsibilities of principals, superintendents, and school board members. (MLF)

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School Labor Strife: Rebuilding the Team

EA 015 152

National School Public Relations Association

Acknowledgement

School Labor Strife: Rebuilding The Team, is one of a series of Communication Alert handbooks published by the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). The handbook is designed to provide school administrators, board of education members, communication specialists and concerned educational leaders with practical ideas and techniques for rebuilding the teacher-administrator team after a strike and achieving school labor peace.

For, if school labor peace is ever to be achieved—and, realistically, it must be achieved if public education as we know it today is to survive—it will be achieved only through improved communication and a rededication effort of all concerned.

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Introduction

As the leaders of the Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO) made plans to strike against the U.S. Government in the summer of 1981, few, if any, probably were aware that they were, in fact, in the process of changing the course of the history of collective bargaining in the public sector.

And when some 12,000 PATCO members threw up picket lines around the nation's airports, few teachers, if any, probably were aware that they were about to be caught up in this dramatic change.

But it didn't take them long.

President Ronald Reagan promptly decertified the organization and fired every one of its striking members despite howls of protest from organized labor.

Philadelphia Bulletin columnist Sandy Grady put it this way: "What Reagan won was total victory, one with popular support. When the air controllers' union was decertified, Reagan had a smashing win—the misled air controllers were punished, their union crushed, and the administration's legal and moral right to stamp out federal strikes firmly established."

Albert Shanker didn't need binoculars to see the handwriting on the wall. The president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) immediately called upon the entire AFT membership to write to Reagan to accuse him of "union busting." Shanker correctly perceived that "the entire labor movement . . . has an overriding interest in the fair and equitable treatment of air traffic controllers."

The Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA) issued a "call to action" to all its members. "It is clear that President Reagan is engaged in union-busting tactics of the worst form." The MTA said, "He has simply turned his back on long-established practices and procedures involved in collective bargaining." Added the association, ominously: "We feel the same thing that happened to PATCO could happen to us." It is a fear well founded.

The MTA's parent organization, the National Education Association (NEA) donated $10,000 to PATCO's legal defense fund and promised the controllers further legal help in their court battles. "The issue," the NEA said, "is whether labor differences between public employees and the government will be settled by national negotiations or by employer ultimatums."

On the other side of the argument, however, the National School Boards Association (NSBA), its member associations around the country long locked in strikes and labor struggles with affiliates of the AFT and the NEA, was delighted.

The association sent President Reagan a telegram supporting his action which, the NSBA said, "will encourage government at all levels to respond firmly to illegal activities of public employee unions." Added one NSBA official: "It sets a tone for our people. No question about it."

The battle was joined. And the impact was immediate.

Outside of Minnesota, where a new state law liberalizing procedures for legal strikes escalated the number from two in 1980–81 to 35 in the first four months of 1981–82, the number of strikes was down substantially throughout the nation.

Pennsylvania, with a law similar to the new one in Minnesota, had led the nation in the number of strikes for five years, saw just 26 teacher strikes in the first four months of 1981–82, compared with 33 the year before and with the high-water mark of 55 in 1975–76.

Nationally, there were 106 strikes in 11 states in 1981–82, compared to 191 strikes during 1980–81.

Clearly, the mood of the nation is changing in relation to strikes, both in the public and the private sector.

What started as a taxpayer rebellion that spawned Proposition 13 in California and led to a landslide presidential victory for Ronald Reagan in 1980, as he ran on a platform of drastically reducing taxes and government spending, has resulted in some serious, sober reflections for labor in 1982.

Those reflections dwell on PATCO, and on the unprecedented labor concessions and contractual recisions at the Chrysler Corporation, and at scenarios like the one at the *Philadelphia Bulletin* in which eight labor unions agreed to reductions in pay to try to (unsuccessfully) save from demise a newspaper that was

once the largest and one of the most prosperous afternoon dailies in the nation.

Newsweek Magazine predicted boldly that negotiations in both private and public sectors in 1982, which it called "the most significant in 35 years," would "pull labor negotiating back toward reality," changing drastically "a system structured for fast growth and unlimited prosperity."

Newsweek predicted settlements in the auto and trucking industry would be "the lowest in decades," and said these settlements, in turn, would generate "the beginnings of other changes that could alter labor relations in the U.S."

Time Magazine, likewise, declared: "For the first time in more than three decades, management this year almost totally dominates wage negotiations." The magazine quotes AFL-CIO Economist John Zalusky as lamenting that "it looks like a tough year, the toughest in memory." *Time* added: "Talk of long strikes or costly wage settlements has virtually disappeared."

In what *Time* described as "a tough time facing organized labor," the magazine said that "trend-setters this time will be fighting a rear-guard action to avoid giving up gains made in past negotiations rather than bargaining for important pay hikes."

Time reported that the General Motors Corporation showed a 22-minute color film called "A Battle for Survival" to some 400,000 unionized workers in an attempt to encourage them to hold down demands.

So how does all this affect the nation's schools? Specifically, what kinds of communication techniques can be applied by school districts in negotiations with employee unions to accomplish both fiscal stability and labor peace in this new era of belt-tightening and fiscal conservatism?

Well, that's what this publication is all about.

There is little question that as public education courses somewhat roughly through the early 1980s, negotiations is a two-edged sword.

One edge is economy. Not only are taxpayers up in arms about increased taxes on top of escalating costs of food, clothing, housing and transportation in the marketplace, but the 1980 census indicates that close to three-quarters (72 percent) of those taxpayers out there have no children attending public schools.

Thus, as public-sector operating costs escalate right along with everything else, school boards around the nation have two

alternatives. One is drastically slashing budgets, and with them the already suspect quality of public education. The other is heaping increased taxes upon rebelling taxpayers, almost three-quarters of whom receive no direct benefit from the public schools.

The other edge is public confidence in public education. If school boards opt for slashed budgets and tough stances against union demands, a battle usually ensues. **Them against us.** Teachers against the administration and the board. Threats of strikes. Strikes. Emotion. Charge, countercharge. Sometimes violence.

And the public is out there watching various factions of the school family take sides and do battle. "Who needs public schools anyway?" "The hell with 'em!" "Let 'em fight!" "This proves that they're not worth our support."

The comic strip character Pogo once wryly observed, "We has met the enemy and they is us." When it comes to public education, Pogo may just be right.

Thus, not only school districts but major corporations—faced with similar problems are, either through foresight or downright necessity, moving toward joint, cooperative, partner-oriented solutions not only to problems of wages and working conditions, but to problems of productivity and accountability.

Says *Newsweek:* "The changing economic environment is producing major changes in issues at the bargaining table." The magazine quotes David Lewin, a Columbia (N.Y.) University professor and labor analyst. Says Lewis: "Many companies have opened their books to unions and are giving them a broader role as a partner in the survival of the business."

"The dominance of criteria in bargaining," he says, "is changing rapidly from comparability and cost-of-living to ability to pay and productivity." Adds *Newsweek*: "At the plant level, more and more unions are cooperating with companies in problem-solving committees and other mechanisms for improving product quality and productivity."

The situation is much the same in education. Thus, this publication will explore in depth such new systems as **"Collective Gaining" in the Forest Park (Ill.) Public Schools, and "Integrative Bargaining" in the Livermore (Calif.) Unified School District.** Both are proven efforts to substitute cooperative conciliation-oriented, mutual-respect methods of problem solving for the standard we/them, win/lose, good guy/bad guy bargaining that threatens not only the public image, but also the very economic survival of so many school districts across the country.

While the thrust of this publication is communication before, during and after the bargaining process, rather than explicit bargaining techniques, the fact remains **that good, positive collective bargaining is, really, good positive communication.** Thus innovative efforts at better communication between school district management and labor bear exploration in these pages.

> **Yet truly cooperative school negotiations are, in the vast majority of cases, still somewhere down the road. The reality, rather, is that standard win/lose negotiations still will be the rule, not the exception, in most cases in the years immediately ahead. Thus, the axiom will still hold that who wins will be determined, to a considerable degree, by which side most effectively conveys its message to the community.**

The development of a detailed communication plan, well in advance of the negotiations, will still be a critical ingredient in the success of any school district's bargaining efforts. And there is little doubt that teacher unions across the country, well aware of the burgeoning taxpayer rebellion, are redoubling their efforts to convince the community of the efficacy of their positions.

This publication contains two detailed plans for communication before, during and after negotiations. One will be **system-wide.** The other will be at the **building level,** where, many times, the real action is, and where communication during the strike will have a profound effect on how quickly the pieces can be put back together again after it is over.

What goes on at the district level during negotiations often is an almost choreographed political and fiscal ballet, with both administration and union playing roles well set in advance, with the outcome, within certain perimeters, almost inevitable.

Yet, at the building level, particularly when schools are kept open during a strike, staffed by administrators and substitute teachers, the dance often is a far more lasting affair, with the effectiveness of the school in the months, perhaps years, ahead **depending on the communication skill of the local building principal during very trying, often emotional times.**

This publication contains a communication plan drawn up, field tested and proven by a principal during a long and bitter strike.

It also contains an extensive section on one of the most important aspects of all: **putting the pieces back together again after the strike.**

It is a crucial task. It is often an emotional task. During strikes, feelings run deep. They are difficult, if not impossible, to forget once the strike ends. Yet, the degree of animosity can be affected greatly by the expertise exhibited in interpersonal communication both during and after the strike. The healing process, thus, need not be a long one.

Reconstruction is imperative, and possible, even after the worst of strikes. This publication contains a blueprint for gluing it all back together again; a blueprint drafted by professionals who have been through it all; a blueprint for restoring education, human relations and public confidence after the strike. It is a blueprint based on communication.

In essence, it is no secret that communication plays perhaps the single most vital role in the complexities and emotions of a school strike. Good communication can help prevent a strike; it can help bring order out of chaos during a strike, and it can be the adhesive that puts the broken pieces back together again after the strike is over.

Chapter 1

Public Sector Bargaining

Myron Lieberman, as usual, was blunt. Writing in a special section of the Phi Delta Kappan *devoted to collective bargaining, the former advocate and now outspoken opponent of collective bargaining for teachers briefly catalogued the impressive gains of public sector bargaining during the past 25 years. Then he delivered a broadside that was feisty even for Lieberman.*

"Despite these impressive signs of vitality," he said, "we can expect the demise of public-sector bargaining in the next 20 years. Intellectually, it is already dead."

That was just the warm-up.

"Like government-enforced racial segregation," he charged, "its practical and political manifestations survive its intellectual demise, but the long-range forecast for public sector bargaining is a decline on all fronts. The issue today is not whether public sector bargaining will decline, but whether it has led or will lead to an irreversible tailspin in **public support for, and confidence in, public education**."

Then the *coup de grace:* "That public sector bargaining is inconsistent with democratic government is no longer in doubt."

Heady words. But, in a reply in the *Kappan* by Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), they were characterized as merely a typically Lieberman "right wing temper tantrum."

Perhaps so, but Lieberman makes a point that will bear heavily on teacher-collective bargaining in the 1980s and beyond. And that point is that the public, an increasingly hostile and tax-weary public, which, under democracy, is supposed, ultimately, to be calling the shots, is **excluded from the collective-bargaining process until it's too late.**

Says Lieberman: "The public's right to learn about and react to the policies embodied in public-sector agreements emerges only after those policies are *fait accompli.* Public-sector bargaining, he charges, "constitutes a unique sharing of public authority with a private interest organization, namely, the public employee union." In public sector bargaining, he contends, "the legislative powers of public bodies ... are shared with a union whose interests run counter to the public interest."

Whatever the expressed intention of the unions may be, Lieberman says, "the end result is too often the protection of the incompetent and insubordinate." And the final result, he adds, "is a loss of support from the citizens."

Shanker, obviously, disagrees, pointing out "20 years ago Lieberman not only predicted that collective bargaining would grow, but he saw it in many ways as the salvation of education."

"If teachers became powerful and moved ahead to fulfill Lieberman's agenda," Shanker chides, "Nirvana would be attained."

"Now, however," Shanker says, "since teachers didn't fulfill the mission he (Lieberman) had set for them, collective bargaining should be destroyed." Lieberman's argument, says Shanker, "is disappointing, not because of the point of view he expresses ... but because there's so little substance to it."

"Surely," Shanker admonishes, "Lieberman doesn't think collective bargaining will go away merely because he wants it to or because he thinks that it should."

"To the extent that there is a decline in public support for public education, there must be other factors involved."

However, Thomas A. Shannon, executive director of the National School Board Association (NSBA), agrees with Lieberman, to a point. Also responding in the *Kappan,* Shannon says Lieberman "makes a strong case for the twin propositions that collective bargaining in public schools has eroded representative governance of those schools and that the strident militance of private unionism, as applied by public school employees, has been a significant factor in alienating some of the public from its schools."

However, Shannon characterizes Lieberman's call for a blanket return to pre-union policy-making procedures as "overbroad."

Instead, Shannon endorses three strategies:

1. In the 12 states where teacher collective bargaining is not now authorized, work to keep the status quo through "continual pressure on the state legislatures and a willingness to go to court, if necessary."
2. In the 38 states where some form of collective bargaining exists, "become as sophisticated as possible in the collective bargaining process," and "launch a lobbying effort in the state legislature either to rescind the collective bargaining statutes, or, where that direct strategy is not realistic, to reform the state collective bargaining legislation" to restrict bargaining to salaries and fringe benefits.
3. Oppose, as "fatal to local representative governance of the public schools," any efforts to achieve a federal collective-bargaining statute for public school employees.

Lieberman, Shannon contends, "is wrong to conclude that collective bargaining in the public schools will shrivel and die on its own." Rather, Shannon says, what is required is "a conscientious dismantling by its opponents over a period of several years.

"Whether that will occur," Shannon concludes, "only the future can tell."

Msgr. S. J. Adamo, a Roman Catholic priest in the Archdiocese of Camden, N.J., isn't exactly sure, like just about everyone else, as to the fate of the teacher union movement in the country.

But the pithy and outspoken columnist on contemporary issues for the *Philadelphia Daily News* knows one thing; no matter what anyone says in any magazine, **teacher militancy isn't going to vanish in the middle of the night.**

In a column, Father Adamo expressed mock surprise at the outrage expressed when Philadelphia teachers, during a bitter 50-day strike, were seen on the nightly TV news tossing rocks and bottles at school buses carrying administrators through massive picket lines to staff open schools, and also voicing their displeasure in "blipped-out" language not exactly conducive to PG ratings for the seven o'clock news.

"It's shocking," he said, "to see teachers sneering and snarling at the strike-breakers. But then which of us can face economic disaster with calm unconcern? Nobody but nobody. Scratch a teacher and discover a tiger; the struggle for survival is never a delicate experience."

Survival. That word keeps popping up these days. Will public schools survive? Will public sector collective bargaining survive? No one really knows. But the struggle for survival, no matter the outcome, as Father Adamo says, is rarely a pretty picture.

> **And collective bargaining, in its present context, is far too often a stormy struggle for survival and a potential deterrent to public confidence in public education.**

That's why some school districts are taking a different approach.

Chapter 2

Collective Conciliation

After almost two decades of teacher strikes in this country, and in the face of declining public confidence in public education, there is a natural need for information on putting the pieces back together again after a bitter, devastating, divisive strike.

The question, more often than not, is "how do we heal the wounds and become a team again?"

It's a critical question. And there are answers. They are outlined in Chapter Six of this publication.

Yet, perhaps the question should be, **"How do I keep the pieces from coming apart in the first place?"**

There are answers to that question, also. They involve changing dramatically the traditional mode of collective bargaining.

The vast communication and public relations problems generated by the standard collective bargaining win/lose techniques are described succinctly by three Livermore, California, educators writing in a special issue of the *Phi Delta Kappan.*

"The goal," they write, "is to 'win' for one's side the lion's share of finite resources," often requiring from both sides "such behaviors as secrecy, strategy, threats and force.

"But," they add, "those bargaining behaviors are the antithesis of what educators desire children to learn: openness, sensitivity, integrity and wisdom."

Through collective bargaining, they contend, "teachers, administrators and school board members . . . have often been thrust into an adversary relationship that forces them to use methods they would deplore in a classroom."

Furthermore, they add, "open conflict among members of the education community also helps to erode the respect of the general public for education."

The three educators write from direct involvement in the collective bargaining process. They are Jeanne Kolar, president of the Livermore Education Association; Leo R. Croce, superintendent of the Livermore Unified School District, and Justin M. Bardellini, former chief negotiator for Livermore and now superintendent of the Fairfield-Suisun (Calif.) Unified School District.

Recognizing the negative consequences of standard collective bargaining, the management and teacher association leaders in Livermore turn to what they call "the brainchild of behavioral science," **integrative bargaining.**

Integrative Bargaining

"In integrative bargaining," they write, "conflict is perceived as a failure in problem solving that can be overcome by the application of effective problem-solving skills. Both parties reconcile their differences at the negotiating table through integrative action and cooperation."

The changeover in Livermore began in 1979 when, by mutual consent, both the school district and the education association agreed to refrain from the strategy of teachers introducing "a multitude of demands" and the district countering with its own long list of "throwaway items." Instead, both sides agreed to openly announce, and stick to, **actual bargaining priorities.**

Then, rather than follow the tradition of declaring impasse on unresolved issues and calling in a mediator, Livermore, taking a page out of negotiations practices beginning to emerge in the private sector, set up "study committees" composed equally of administrators appointed by the superintendent and teachers appointed by the teacher association, with one board member serving either as an observer or a participant.

The task of each study committee was to study one unresolved issue and to make recommendations for resolution to the negotiators.

The result in Livermore, according to the three educators, was:

- The committees "objectively examined data and considered alternative solutions that best met the needs and concerns of management and teachers without losing sight of district educational goals."
- "Honest dialogue took place between management and teachers, and perceptions changed as needs were openly examined."
- A large number of people was able to contribute information, feedback and recommendations, and more teachers became aware of, and involved in, the problems and their solutions.
- Although the committee recommendations were not binding on either side, "because they were mutually arrived at they are more conducive to eventual agreement than traditional bargaining table strategy."
- The study committees "increased mutual understanding" among the various segments of the education community and "initiated dialogue among elementary teachers, secondary teachers, principals and district office administrators."

Another factor in integrative bargaining is having a known and respected chief negotiator from within the school district, rather than someone hired from the outside.

Outside negotiators, the Livermore educators contended, "often leave the district when their work is completed: thus they have little concern for the management/teacher relationships that may be damaged in the bargaining process."

To avoid such problems, they wrote, Livermore chooses as a chief negotiator, **"a district administrator who is skilled in interpersonal communication, problem solving and conflict resolution."**

Another factor in integrative bargaining is to find a way "to give teachers direct input to the board without sacrificing board unity or the integrity of the board negotiator." Thus, the president of the teacher association and the association's chief negotiator both attend **executive sessions** of the board "to present important items on which the teachers wish to argue their own case."

During these sessions, "board members listen to such presentations and ask qualifying questions," with both parties agreeing "that this is not a time for negotiations."

There are two major factors in making the process work:

1. "Conflicts, mistakes and misunderstandings inevitably arise. Therefore, both parties must be committed to moving away from the traditional adversary roles of management and teachers.
2. "It is imperative that the superintendent and the president of the teacher association respect one another and cooperate to achieve district goals. Their professional relationship provides a model for other administrators and teachers in the district. **Communication between them must be open and shared to avoid misunderstandings**."

In Livermore, according to the three authors, the president of the teacher association has "ready access to the superintendent," and "together they review school board agendas and talk over potential problems. Thus, these leaders never have to engage in conflict publicly."

Admittedly, all isn't sweetness and light, since "grievances do arise when the contract language is unclear and needs interpretation." But, "both sides see the grievance procedure as a way to address problems and solve them amicably."

The lessons to be learned, according to the authors:

- "This alternative approach to traditional collective bargaining calls for honesty, mutual trust and cooperation between the parties involved."
- The changes in Livermore came about "because many individuals were willing to take the necessary risks. The teacher bargaining teams and the association's executive board had to trust central administrators and the school board had to be sensitive and responsive to the teachers' perceptions and needs."
- Having risked trusting one another, Livermore school management and teachers are now working together in a "climate of mutual honesty and respect."

"Collective Gaining"

A similar process, called "**collective gaining,**" is practiced in the **Forest Park (Ill.) Public Schools.**

As described by three more educators in *Phi Delta Kappan*'s in-depth look at collective bargaining, collective gaining came "at a time when board/teacher dialogue was strained, mistrust prevailed, and public support of public schools was waning." Thus, teachers, administrators and school board members decided to try "a new method of solving problems and resolving conflicts."

Constructive gaining began in Forest Park in 1972.

Like the integrative bargaining structure in Livermore, Forest Park's process "is **an integrative approach to negotiating; that is, the parties strive to reach agreements that integrate the wants, needs and desires of both sides.**"

Research findings, the authors contend, "suggest that this is the most satisfactory method of conflict resolution because it produces the most enduring settlements." Yet, they quickly add, "it also is one of the more difficult modes of conflict resolution." There are several reasons:

- Participants must be open with one another and have the ability to listen objectively.
- Participants must trust and respect one another.
- Each side must strive to understand and accommodate the other.
- Communication of ideas and recommendations must be unrestricted, and participants cannot become hostile or defensive.
- Hidden agendas must be made public.

In Forest Park, the process is working. Here's how:

1. The gaining committee consists of five teachers, the superintendent, a principal and two school board members.
2. While "each committee member presents the attitudes and opinions of the group he or she represents, gaining requires that the committee members be flexible enough to avoid taking intransient positions that make compromise impossible."
3. The committee "must strive for collaborative problem solving and decision making."
4. The goal is "to find solutions that are beneficial to the total group."

It is the contention of the authors that "traditional negotiating behavior is inappropriate and counterproductive." Or, more bluntly put: "It seems absurd that educators, who should be working collectively for the benefit of children, so often try to resolve differences by pitting themselves against one another."

In Forest Park, collective gaining is a year-round process. Gaining meetings are held on the first Tuesday of each month, with special meetings scheduled as required. Meeting throughout the year "prevents time pressures from influencing decision-making" and fosters "creative problem solving that might be restrained if the group met solely for negotiating a contract."

The goal is simple: "Solution of the problems should potentially benefit everyone—children, parents, teachers, administrators and board members." Achieving it, however, often is something else.

The first rule is to prohibit voting as a means of decision making, and to seek, instead, a general committee concensus on each item discussed. The process of consensus, according to the three Forest Park educators, "requires committee members to make every effort to accommodate varying positions and differing opinions. If they manage to do so, they develop a feeling of ownership and a commitment to successful implementation of the final solution."

There is little room in the process for failure. Said the authors: "When committee members find it hard to reach consensus, they must reassess their positions to find areas of agreement and areas in which they are able to make more effort to accommodate divergent points of view."

Other significant, positive aspects are:

- Gaining items can be carried over from meeting to meeting, making possible "a thorough review of all relevant information" and "increasing the probability that the final decision will be acceptable to everyone."
- Gaining gives teachers regular access to the board and the administration whenever the need arises.

- Principals are given input into the decision-making process by allowing them to share with the board and the administration their reaction to proposed agreements with the teachers before settlement is reached.
- Gaining "has taught board members a great deal about the education process; it has also allowed them to collaborate—not compete—with teachers and administrators."

There are some cautions, however, for school districts embarking on this type of cooperative bargaining for the first time, according to the three Illinois educators:

1. **Gaining is, obviously, a time-consuming process.** It is important that teachers, board members and administrators not lose sight of the purpose of discussion and become impatient with the process.
2. **Some teachers in Forest Park "see gaining as too informal,** too subject to changes in attitude of board members and administrators and not binding enough to protect teacher security and professional rights adequately."

Thus, the authors warn, "historical or political factors may prevent the total replacement of collective bargaining by gaining in some districts." In this case, they counsel, such districts may find that gaining works for non-monetary issues, while collective bargaining must be used for such issues as salary and fringe benefits. "The range of gaining items can be increased," they suggest, "as the participants gain experience and confidence in collaborative problem solving."

Their final advice: "People make the process work—people who are truly committed to finding ways to solve problems while preserving an environment that nurtures respect for the opinion of others."

Labor Peace

Yet, the question is whether or not the pendulum is ready, here in the early 1980s, to begin swinging back again toward labor peace in the nation's schools.

For it wasn't too many years ago that newfound collective bargaining rights for teachers created an almost fascinating strug-

gle, in the eyes of the public, between suddenly fiesty teachers and somewhat startled school boards from New York to California.

The public, as spectators, chose sides and rooted for their team. It was, in many communities, the liveliest and most passionate public sporting event of the year.

Strategies on both sides were geared for combat, for victory. There was rarely a middle ground in teacher negotiations. Hardly "an environment that nurtures respect for the opinion of others." It was win or lose, and no holds barred. A scenario of collaborative problem solving was, in most cases, all but unthinkable.

Yet, today, the scenario could be on the brink of change, in the face of runaway inflation and an increasingly cantankerous taxpaying public that is, in the words of the movie, "Network," "mad as hell and not going to take it any more."

Suddenly, public schools, and, with them, teachers and administrators and boards of education, cost money. Big money. And with the increased spending comes increased taxes.

Yet, at the same time, there is decreasing enrollment, decreasing test scores, decreasing discipline, decreasing respect for authority, for morality, for law, for the flag, for the basic elements of what used to form the bedrock of public education a generation or two ago.

Stir in bitter negotiations and strikes, and the once calm, cohesive, respected, perhaps revered components of the industry of public education now, suddenly, are at each others' throats over power in the public sector and over control of the diminishing tax dollar.

The result is a rapidly declining percent of public confidence in public schools and the people who staff them.

Thus, collaborative problem solving, be it called integrative bargaining or collective gaining, or whatever, may just be a process of interpersonal communication whose time has come.

Chapter 3

Preparing for a Strike

No matter how dramatically things change in the 1980s—the economy, the tactics of labor, the mood of the taxpayer, the move toward more conciliatory bargaining procedures—school strikes will continue, to some degree, to be inevitable.

Thus, a school district that is **unprepared to communicate its case in the public arena** is a school district unprepared even to begin negotiations on an equal community relations footing with its teacher organization.

Make no mistake about it. The teacher organization, with expert communication and community relations assistance from well-trained personnel at state and national levels, is well prepared to take its case, thoroughly and convincingly, to the public.

And there is little doubt anymore that, in most school strikes, which side prevails will be largely determined by which side **most effectively conveys its message to the community**

Teacher unions, you can be sure, have developed, over the years, a very careful game plan for communicating with the public.

Minnesota: A Case Study

In Minnesota, the new national leader in teacher strikes with 35 in the first four months of the 1981–82 school year, the Minnesota Education Association (MEA) issued to all its affiliates a joint MEA/National Education Association (NEA) document called, "Settlement Task Force, General Strategy."

The number one topic is, "The Need for Community Relations."

Its dogma: "Teachers are the most important element in our society today. We are the last bastion of support for quality education. We must tell the public and get them to understand we are losing their battle."

MEA Recommendations for Affiliates:

- "There are certain people in every community who run it. Find them and communicate.
- "Who now is better prepared to have a voice in the educational process than teachers? Sell! Sell!
- "Contracts should be broken down into layman's language so they are understandable and related to how they will affect the education of kids, not how they will benefit teachers. If mama can be convinced that if you don't get prep time her child will suffer, then you have an advocate for prep time.
- "Most opponents of education and teachers use public greed as their main weapon. They are perfectly willing to sacrifice the education of children in order to save enough so the parent can buy another snowmobile. We must call them on this. Surface the issue and cut them off before they get a toe hold."
- Point out that "the state's second largest industry is run by part-timers (school boards) unexperienced in the field that they dominate. Teachers spend a great deal of time, money and effort becoming educators. School board members are put on an equal level by someone dropping a ballot in a box."

MEA Communication Mandates:

- "Word of mouth, (eyeball to eyeball) is the best kind. It must be organized. Everyone must be saying the same thing. Don't forget the teacher angle, all of the time.
- "The media. Organize, make contacts. Feed information. Be there first with the most. Remember, relate on how it affects the students. 'Remember mama.'
- "A sympathetic public is not one that feels sorry for you, but instead appreciates what you do, because you told them, and is prepared to help you. We must stop apologizing for education costing money. What we must do is convince everyone that it is worth every dime.
- "Communication is the key to building enthusiasm, excitement and commitment."

In a six-point section called, "Gear up for Settlement," three of the MEA recommendations deal with communication. They contain excellent advice that far too many school boards still ignore until it is too late. That advice is:

1. "Communicate with the public. The public is understandably bored by the negotiation process, except as it might lead to increased taxes. Every association has the obligation to educate the citizenry to its positions and concerns—and besides, it's much too late in the spring or summer to start a communication program if negotiations bog down.
2. "Develop a member communication system. The membership communication system is a problem worth attacking early and with a vengeance. An uninformed membership is a suspicious membership.
3. "Get information to the media. Many people think of the news media personnel only in terms of crisis, rather than as a group of people whose business is to report the news on the basis of sound background information. Educators should not blame the news media for inaccurate reporting if they themselves have not bothered to keep media personnel informed consistently throughout the bargaining process."

Zeroing in on the media, the MEA counsels its affiliates:

- "Start early. Announce the appointment of the negotiation team, the first session scheduled and some general areas of educational concern of the association.
- "Make up a negotiation fact sheet for distribution to media personnel. Regularly inform the media of progress or lack of progress, even when you know that you don't have hard news to offer. Reporters will appreciate having been kept abreast of goings-on throughout the bargaining session when it's time to report on settlement or impasse."

In Minnesota, the timeline set up for bargaining, mediation and fact finding by the new state law covering teacher negotiations runs out in late September. That's when a legal strike can take place.

Thus, MEA has published a month-by-month communications plan beginning a year in advance. Some of the plan's highlights are:

- **October:** Begin newsletter articles predicting the future course of bargaining. "Purpose: to establish and build credibility for the association's written word."
- **November:** News release announcing membership bargaining survey. "Purpose: to build early community identity with teacher collective bargaining at a noncontroversial time." Also, "begin articles and series of flyers on bargaining issues as they relate to better education for students."
- **December:** Continue issuing flyers to the community. "Purpose: to build early support for the bargaining team."
- **March:** Major news release announcing the opening of bargaining talks April 1.
- **April:** "News release following opening of negotiations; issues that are on the table that are good for students."
- **May:** "Publish major document for teachers showing comparison between board and association bargaining positions."
- **June:** "News release announcing impasse and request for mediation."
- **July:** "Crisis: news release announcing results of mediation, news release on breakdown of mediation. Buy billboard or newspaper space."
- **August:** "Teachers pack school board meetings to press demand for meaningful bargaining: alert news media. Arrange news conference on TV, interviews. Billboard or newspaper ads with soft-sell message."
- **September:** "Establishment of a strike committee. Take a strike vote—escalate community PR."
- **October:** "News release on strike vote. Prepare community and teacher information packets. Or, a news release and/or news conference announcing contract settlement and ratification. Series of articles in newsletter on 'Know Your Contract.'"

The NEA/MEA document also advocates a wide variety of additional communication methods during the year, including a community newsletter, speakers' bureau, coffee klatches, yard signs, bumper stickers, public service announcements, TV and radio talk shows, a weekly newspaper column, truth booths and truth wagons, sidewalk open houses, armbands, buttons, badges, human billboards, leafleting, marches and telephone campaigns.

Concludes the document: "Teachers are the best P.R. people around. Parents may grumble about taxes, tenure, or the presumed 9–3 lifestyle, but they rarely connect this with their child's teacher. That teacher is okay. It's the others parents worry about. So, individually, the teacher has supporters. Put us all together and we have an army."

Any school board that underestimates the communication capability of the teacher army is a school board squarely behind the negotiations eight ball in its own community.

The Minnesota School Boards Association (MSBA), like many of its counterparts around the nation, is well aware of the communication capability of teacher associations during the negotiations process, and it pulls no punches in advising its membership.

"It is important to remember," the MSBA told all its affiliates in answer to the MEA communication offensive, "that a school district exists for the purpose of providing quality educational services to the students within its jurisdictional boundaries. The board's role is to provide policy decisions which will provide for maximal utilization of resources, quality programs and the retention of constituent rights affecting the educational future of its children.

"Primarily, the union exists for the economic and political betterment of itself and its membership. A strike will bring that dichotomy sharply into focus. The strike is a win-lose situation which the district cannot afford to lose."

The keys to winning any strike situation, according to MSBA, are planning and communication.

On planning: "The experience of those who have been through a strike situation indicates that a district must have a strike plan developed before the strike occurs. The total disruption of normal procedure and all the associated pressures

focused upon the management team by a strike situation make pre-planning imperative. Therefore, the initial phase of any strike plan is to create a planning committee which will identify all foreseeable problems and develop action solutions."

On communication: Keep your public, students and staff (both striking and non-striking) informed by providing them with accurate, factual information. **DO NOT** emotionalize the conflict, as this is what the strikers desire. **DO NOT** criticize striking employees for this action except through documented facts.

MSBA Communication

- **Keep your public, students and staff (both striking and non-striking) informed by providing them with accurate, factual information.**
- **DO NOT emotionalize the conflict as this is what the strikers desire.**
- **DO NOT criticize striking employees for their actions except through documented facts.**
  ("A strike is a last resort technique which makes everything and everyone fair game. The key to beating a strike is unity, discipline and judicious use of verifiable information.")
- **Establish a telephone "hot-line" system to provide factual information to the public.**
- **Print a newsletter citing basic strike issues and the status of negotiations. Send it to every community resident.**
- **Preaddress envelopes for both community and staff to allow instant mailings when necessary.**
- **Deal with the media through one spokesperson. Be totally honest. Refrain from attacking teachers. Be concise and factual about teacher salaries and benefits, district financial limitations, the negotiations law and any other related information.**

Finally, the MSBA staff in a series of statewide, pre-strike workshops, told its affiliates in effect: don't run scared; don't give away the store; be prepared to take a strike; the world won't come to an end.

While the state's 35 strikes led the nation, actually the MEA had predicted 100 or more strikes among the state's 434 school districts. So almost 400 didn't strike!

Why?

According to MSBA Field Service Director Jim Schmid, there were three principal reasons, and two of them were bad: one, some districts had cash reserves and put them on the table to finance a contract; two, "some other districts didn't want a strike, come hell or high water; they ran scared and bought their way out of a strike."

The third reason, according to Schmid, was that "some few districts had good rapport with their teachers." They were able to bargain reasonably because of this good rapport and reach a fair and equitable agreement with their teacher organization.

But once the strikes began, according to Mike Torkelson, director of information for the MSBA, the **key to survival was communication.**

"In school districts where they said, 'It'll never happen in my district,' and thus, there was no communication plan, administrators and school board members generally were unprepared to handle the vast communication needs of a strike situation," Torkelson said. The result was some very difficult and emotional times.

However, districts with a good communication plan, Torkelson said, found that they could keep things together and survive the crush of a strike and it was not, indeed, the end of the world.

Chapter 4

Negotiations

A negotiations and strike contingency communication plan must be in place before negotiations begin.

For as soon as the negotiators sit down across the table from each other, there are communication questions to be answered. Like, when to go public?

In business and industry and in the public sector, it is generally held that collective bargaining negotiations should be conducted in private and confidential meetings between the negotiation teams. There is, however, a growing tendency today to lift the blanket of silence, particularly in the public sector with the adoption in many states of "sunshine laws" requiring bargaining sessions in the open.

Whatever the method, a well-organized communication plan is not only essential, but can be extremely helpful in reaching a more favorable agreement.

A communication plan that results primarily from reaction to a crisis situation in negotiations, or in reaction to union public relations campaigns, may be doomed to failure, according to Ted Hoffman, a former board member of San Marino (Calif.) Unified School District, and general manager, Research and Resources Company, San Marino.

According to Hoffman, to be most effective with communications during negotiations, the board of education and district administrators should have developed and maintained an effective program of communications **over a period of time that has helped:**

- Employees and the community to understand and appreciate the sincerity of the board's motives and its fair consideration for all concerned: the students, the teachers, the administrators, the taxpayers, and the public in general.
- The community and the teachers to properly interpret the board's and the district's representations and the soundness of its actions.
- Build mutual respect, confidence, and credibility with regard to communications, and overall employee and community relations.

Hoffman recommends that a communications program during negotiations be organized with effective **four-way communications:** Up, Down, Across and Out. To be effective, he says, "a communications program during negotiations should include:

1. The encouragement of upward communications with a willingness to listen and perceive what the readings and the basic issues are with regard to negotiations.

2. Provision of summary information to the management team on the status of negotiations. And while the information provided may not necessarily be impartial, it must be factual. Also, it must be supportive of the board's position on key issues.

3. Clearance and timing of communication with the district's bargaining team. Premature release of data may make bargaining more difficult for both parties and it is generally inadvisable to publicize the blow-by-blow accounts of negotiations, the detail of tentative agreements or legalistic language.

4. A preliminary letter explaining the intentions of the district and the board should be prepared with legal counsel, the district's spokesperson, and the district's chief negotiator. Such a letter should emphasize the district's desire to keep employees informed on issues affecting their welfare and not to be considered as an attempt to bypass the union or the employee representatives.

5. Recognize the importance of public communications in obtaining public support for the district's position on basic issues and negotiations.

6. Communications should stress consideration for the needs of the community, the taxpayer concerns, what is in the best interest of the children, along with fairness to all employees."

Hoffman recommends the useful consideration of "The Art of Reasonable Opposition" which he defines as **the ability to oppose an idea without opposing the union or individuals.** He says that this is an art as important to a board or superintendent as is the sense of timing and maintenance of a sense of humor.

Communication during negotiations, according to Hoffman, with all the pressures, tactics, conflicts and issues, takes careful planning and considerations, public relations skills, patience, and a well-developed sense of timing. He offers 12 recommendations to help obtain favorable and effective communication during negotiations:

1. Develop your communication program months, not days, ahead.
2. Respect your own bargaining team and clear all communication with the team and through the district spokesperson.
3. Establish at the outset a regular briefing method for the management team and the intentions of the district with regard to keeping the employees informed.
4. Build your negotiation communication program on a reasoned and planned approach and anticipate questions about it.
5. Try to anticipate the union's stand even before you know its position.
6. Explain the board's viewpoint and back up management's position on bargaining issues with local facts and information with which the employees are familiar.
7. Stay away from detailed discussions of specific clauses, legalistic and technical negotiation jargon, and the profundities of economics.
8. In your communication, use all your tools of communication.
9. Keep cool. Try to keep negotiation communication timely, summarized and fair.
10. Keep an eye on your own progress. Do not make the mistake of assuming that you are getting through to everyone.
11. Have only one spokesperson for the district.
12. Take the position that the board and the district are doing what is in the fair and best interest of the students, the community, the teachers, and the effective administration of the district.

Naming A Spokesperson

While it is generally agreed that there should be only one spokesperson, at least during the negotiations phase, it is not generally agreed who this person should be.

There is, however, among a growing number of districts that have experienced negotiations and strikes, agreement that the spokesperson **should not be the superintendent of schools.** This is particularly important when looking forward to that critical time after any strike.

It is the superintendent who must pick up the pieces and paste them back together again. And for him or her to assume an adversary role with the teachers at any stage of the negotiations or strike is a serious mistake. It's pretty tough for a superintendent to heal the wounds if he or she inflicted some of them in the first place.

There is also growing agreement that the spokesperson **should not be the president of the board of education.** The board president more than likely will still be the board president after a strike. If he or she has been involved in a running verbal battle with the union, that battle most probably will perpetuate itself at board meetings long after the strike has been settled. It may be difficult for the board president to keep quiet in the face of union broadsides, but in the long run, charge and countercharge on the part of the president of the board will benefit neither the board nor the community it serves.

The most obvious spokesperson during negotiations, then, would be the chief negotiator. The negotiator is in the best position to know what should be said and what shouldn't and how statements will affect what is going on across the bargaining table.

The Role of the PR Specialist

The role of the PR specialist, most districts find, should be one of close contact with the negotiating team, sitting in on its caucuses, asking questions, keeping totally up on the issues and the action across the bargaining table.

The PR specialists should use their expertise to advise the chief spokesperson on press and public relations and on suggested content of written statements. It is this expertise that provides the management team with guidelines for working with the media—press, radio and TV—which can go a long way to sustaining and supporting the credibility of the board's actions both during negotiations and in a strike, if one evolves.

A first step for a PR specialist should be to draw up a set of media guidelines for the management team:

- **Don't tell the media what to write.** Give reporters the facts, the full facts, concerning management's position on the major negotiations issues. Give them honestly and frankly and leave it up to the reporters how to construct the story.
- **Don't speak "off the record"** unless asked to do so by the media.
- **Don't use jargon.** Keep it simple and clear, short words, short sentences and short paragraphs.
- **Be scrupulously accurate.** Avoid off-hand, unresearched, inaccurate remarks which will quickly come back over the bargaining table to haunt the negotiation team.
- **Don't call the other side names.** Such activity can only produce lost credibility in the community. If you are baited, steer clear of the hook. A few words said publicly in anger can set bargaining back for days.
- **Don't play favorites with reporters.** If you start playing favorites during the clamor of news coverage of a major strike, the rest of the media will seek other sources, like the union leaders, for instance.
- **Don't ever say, "This is our 'final' offer."** In bargaining there is never a "final" offer. Final offers are "agreements reached"—up until then the use of "final offers" is just a bargaining ploy and the media know it and the teachers know it.
- **Don't try to obtain publicity by pressure.** By trying to persuade someone with influence in your community to pressure the local news media into using your side of the negotiations or strike story, you are courting the very real possibility that you will be ignored, at best, or at worst, exposed for what you are trying.
- **Be honest, accurate, frank and friendly.**

Communicating With Parents and Community

While the parents and community do not care what the school district's chief spokesperson thinks about the union's chief negotiator, they do expect to be informed honestly and objectively about the issues that could lead to a strike. Experience has shown that parents and community want specific types of information, and many districts are developing **Fact Sheets** to provide this information. Such sheets should include:

- What are the issues, and what is their financial impact on the pocketbook of the parent/taxpayer?
- What about the union's charge that by opposing their requests you're diminishing the quality of education offered to students in the school district?
- If the board has its way in negotiations, how would the contract affect the quality of education?
- If there is a strike, will the schools be open?
  —Will there be transportation and lunches?
  —Will the children be safe?
  —Might school buildings be closed at midday during a strike, sending children of working parents out on the street with no adult supervision?
- Whom or where can a parent call to get up-to-the-minute information about the imminence of a strike? (List names, phone numbers, and addresses.)
- Can parents help out in the schools if there is a strike?

But how do you get these fact sheets to parents? Not by sending them home with the students. That is like waving a red flag in the teacher association's face, inviting open resistance on the part of the classroom teacher and a confrontation you don't need any part of, particularly during the negotiation process.

The answer is the mail. Small school districts should have a list of ready-before-hand mailing addresses of the community, or at least every household with children in the schools. A full set of mailing labels should be prepared ahead of time.

Larger school districts should have lists of all key communicators in the community: parent-group leaders, civic and community groups, block associations, community service groups, businessmen, political leaders, ministers—just about anyone with an interest in the community and its schools. If and when negotiations are at an impasse; when the teachers' association decides to take its case to the community, all these contacts must be fully informed by fact sheets that are factual.

Communicating with Staff

When a strike is imminent, perhaps the most important communication must go to staff—to the staff directly affected by the strike but also to the rest of the school district employees. They, above all, must know, concisely and clearly, the administration's position on the issues in contention.

And how do you distribute this staff communication? Again, use the mails. You want to make certain that every member of your school family receives this critical communique. A set (or sets) of pre-addressed labels will expedite distribution of this information when and if the time comes.

The National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) has developed the following guidelines for communicating with staff:

Guidelines for Communicating with Staff

- Content should be absolutely factual, low-key and non-threatening.
- Don't editorialize. If the strike is illegal in your area say so. Cite the state law, chapter and verse.
- Explain why you have rejected certain union demands that now form the principal strike issues.
- Don't tar all teachers with the same brush if you are having problems with the association and its leaders. Differentiate between the negotiators and the rest of the employees.
- List concessions management has already made.
- Detail your "last" offer to the teachers' association. Explain why, particularly financially, you feel you shouldn't go any further. Employees are taxpayers, too, and away from the heat of the negotiating table they can look objectively at the financial impact an inflated settlement would have on the community.
- Send the communique to every staff member—not just the group threatening to strike, but all employee groups—professional and support staff members.
- Remember that there is a fine line between being argumentative and setting the record straight. Stay on the straight side even if it pains you to do so. The reader's reaction will depend largely on the tone of the communication.

Joseph E. Flannery, director of field services for the New Jersey School Boards Association has developed a list of suggestions to help prepare for crisis communication during labor relations problems. Flannery points out that internal and external publics will be affected—especially children and parents. If something occurs abruptly, such as a sudden strike, the entire community may find itself torn by bitter and emotional division. At this point, Flannery says, "your procedures on communicating better be clear." He suggests:

- Identify key communicators on the staff and in the community. They will inform you of a potential crisis before it occurs.
- Learn the language of labor relations. Never use jargon. Use the correct terms to describe the crisis in a frank and unemotional manner. Be HIP . . . Honest, Informative and Positive.
- Have the district adopt a policy on communication which includes: who is the chief spokesperson, what is the role of all administrators in crisis situations, when the district will go public with its information, where the information will be distributed, and why the district wants to communicate.
- Know what the issues are and be accurate with your facts. Most media people are not trained in labor relations. You can educate them as well as inform them if you work at it. Interpret the financial impact on taxpayers. Explain why the demands were rejected and what the district offered.
- Compile a list of media people including home and office telephone numbers and their respective deadlines. Settlements sometimes occur in the "wee hours."
- Keep staff informed as well as the public.
- Stress safety of children. This is a major concern during crisis situations.
- Know your state laws—educational, labor relations and others. What is an injunction? Unfair labor practice? Uncertified substitutes? Make-up days, etc.?
- Prepare advance releases on: mediation/fact-finding/or arbitration. This helps your publics understand the process better.

Flannery reminds board members and superintendents that, if you've been communicating effectively, the pressure in a crisis will be far easier to deal with. Your credibility will already have been established.

During negotiations school principals need to become communicators—fully knowledgeable about the process of negotiations and the issues being negotiated, according to Ann H. Barkelew, former public information officer for Los Angeles County Schools, and now assistant to the president of Munsingwear Inc.

Principals who talk about negotiations with objectivity and patience, according to Barkelew, will make it possible for the issues to be kept at the table—and out of the classroom. To do this she offers the following 14 points for principals:

1. **Stay up to date on the issues, the status of each, and the position of the district on each . . . following every negotiation session.**
2. **When you are questioned, answer objectively. Don't react. Don't be defensive.**
3. **Be sure your staff members are getting district positions.**
4. **Correct bad information—calmly and rationally.**
5. **Be involved—participate in negotiations.**
6. **Provide input into district negotiations.**
7. **Avoid adversary relationships with staff—no editorializing, no commentaries.**
8. **Don't take demonstrations personally.**
9. **Be sure student newspapers—when interested—carry both sides.**
10. **Be aware of any teacher influence provoking student reaction and demonstration.**
11. **Keep advisory groups updated—help them keep negotiations in perspective.**
12. **If negotiations become "heated," keep student leaders and key community contacts updated.**
13. **Speak in generalities—don't reveal details or confidential strategies.**
14. **Exude confidence . . . don't be apologetic.**

Chapter 5

The Strike

When school employees strike, the impact on the community is determined by public opinion. Strike communication, how it is handled and when it occurs, will determine whether public opinion supports the school board/district or the strikers.

Public opinion is formed in a strike situation by reports in or on the media, and through open lines of communication between a school district board of education and administration and the internal and external publics.

It follows then that the key to effective communication during a strike is advance planning. And that doesn't mean planning a day or two, or even a week or two ahead of time.

It means that the day you begin negotiations you must face the possibility that there may be a strike. And that's the time to begin to plan a comprehensive communication network to be used if a strike occurs.

The American Association of School Administrators (AASA) counsels that advance planning gives the management time to discuss the plan with others like the police department, the mayor, the city or town council, board of supervisors, suppliers who must provide goods to the schools during a strike, public transportation officials, etc.

Communication Center

A communication center where strike and negotiations information can be gathered, analyzed and communicated in a systematic, professional and dispassionate way to the many publics affected by a strike is the keystone of any communication plan.

Good, quick communication means good, quick decisions. Communication provides the mechanism to keep things together during the strike. The center should be in the administration building near the superintendent's office. It should be staffed with a bank of telephones—depending, of course, on the size of the school district and its communication needs—to enable communication between schools, media, police, parents and other interested parties.

There should also be a log book for recording all incoming and outgoing telephone calls as well as strike incidents, since the latter information can be invaluable during a court injunction hearing.

It is in the communication center that the critical management decisions—except those requiring board action—will be made during a strike. Perhaps the most important aspect of the communication center and the information developed there is the establishment of credibility. There has to be credibility behind pupil attendance figures and the reports on the number of teachers reporting for work. A network and reporting plan must be established and maintained between the center and each school building principal.

Each day the communication center will need to report on:

- How many teachers were in their classrooms
- How many teachers were out of their classrooms
- How many students were in school
- How many replacement teachers were in the classrooms
- How many support staff and parent volunteers were there
- What kinds of questions and concerns are being telephoned in to each school
- Any incidents of vandalism or violence
- How many schools are open
- If there are regular schedules
- If buses are running
- If lunches are being served
- If it is safe to send children to school
- If teaching and learning are really happening
- If students will be penalized if they stay home
- What the district is doing to bring the situation to an end.

Touch All Bases

When a strike is imminent regular channels of communication can be disrupted, causing a frantic search for alternatives. Contingency plans should include:

- Establishment of communications procedures with the board, administration and at the building level early to avoid premature public negotiation on issues.
- Installation of phone lines with unlisted phone numbers in the central communication center and in principals' offices.
- Installation of answering devices to handle the anticipated flood of information requests as well as when the district switchboard is closed.
- Alternative plans to deliver interschool mail if truck drivers go out on strike or are unwilling to cross picket lines. (Management itself may have to deliver the printed word.)
- Alternative means of printing materials in case an outside printer is needed. Such printers may also have a union shop and be unwilling to handle the business. (Inhouse copy machines may need to be utilized instead.)
- Ways to handle the administration switchboard in case telephone operators also go out on strike or refuse to cross picket lines. Somebody in management better learn how to use the switchboard. (This is a good year-round idea in case of storms and other crisis situations.)

Spokespersons During a Strike

During a strike there is a dual demand for information if schools are to be kept open. One is for continued status reports on negotiations. The other is for status reports on conditions in the schools.

It is the recommendation of NSPRA that during a strike there should be **two management spokespersons:** one—preferably the **chief negotiator**—commenting on the negotiations, and the other—preferably the **communications specialist**—commenting on operational matters.

Both usually are well-trained in their positions and are capable of stating management's positions as well as taking the flak that goes with it.

The Superintendent

Newspaper, radio and television reporters will want interviews and statements moments after a strike begins. A superintendent will have his hands full making a number of administrative decisions and should not immediately face the media, according to Oscar W. Knade, superintendent of schools, Williamsport, (Pa.) Area School District. "The district spokesperson can," according to Knade, "act as a buffer with the media."

"The superintendent should avoid being trapped into giving opinions about work-stoppage situations," according to Knade, "because the answers could very well be construed as unfair labor practices later or used by the union to make the superintendent a target or scapegoat for all labor problems."

There is no doubt that the superintendent is the key person to glue everything back together after the strike and as such should refrain from being drawn into the inevitable emotional charges and countercharges that surround a strike situation.

That's not to say that the superintendent should be a bystander during a strike. Far from it. He or she will play a number of key communication roles during the emergency: holding background briefing sessions for the community's **key communicators,** conferring daily with the school board or a board committee on policy matters in the schools and on negotiations, making management decisions based on communication input from the field on a day-to-day operation of the schools, and planning to bring the system together again once the strike is over.

The School Board

Individual members of the board of education will be under great stress during a work stoppage, according to the American Association of School Administrators (AASA). This may include threatening telephone calls, picketing of the board members' homes, harrassment (including spouses and family members) and personal pressure from strike sympathizers or the general citizenry who may not agree with the board's position.

Louise Stoll, a past president of the Berkeley (Calif.) School Board, offers these suggestions on communicating during a strike:

- Board members must find ways to maintain visibility within the community, give assurances that they are informed concerning the negotiations process, and that they will not be forced into making decisions not in the best interests of the constituency they represent.
- It is important that no matter how well-informed and decisive board members are, they not commit themselves publicly to any position with such firmness that compromise, which might be demanded later in the bargaining process, becomes impossible.
- Board members should know—and never forget—that while it is very easy for a teacher organization to put together a telephone tree so a board member receives numerous calls expressing support for a teacher organization demand, this telephone tree might not reflect the sentiments of the community. It is also very easy for a teacher organization to create a letter-writing campaign within the community, which, because it is unopposed, appears persuasive.
- Board members have the advantage of regularly scheduled public meetings. These provide an excellent forum for expressing opinions and reinforcing positions taken during negotiations or on issues relating to a strike.

The Principal

The principal, like the board member, is a person in the middle, but he or she is also on the day-to-day firing line out in the schools. The superintendent and the board are ordering that schools be kept open and the union wants them closed down.

Teachers on the picket line and teachers crossing it are trading insults, at best. Sometimes there's violence. Parents are confused. There's an educational program to be run. And, in his or her spare time, the principal has to find time to communicate too!

Caroline C. Kirvin, principal of the Jefferson Elementary School in Burbank, California, who has been through a bitter, divisive teacher strike, has some first-hand advice for her colleagues.

"There can be no cookbook approaches to strikes," she says, "because so many variables exist in each individual instance. There are, however, areas of responsibility that should receive your attention and consideration before, during and after a strike. What you personally, as building principal, do about each of these areas will depend on your own leadership, skill and style."

Well before the strike, Kirvin says, a principal's planning must begin in the following areas:

- **Assessing personnel resources,** including substitutes and volunteers, likely to be available during a strike, and making sure sufficient instructional materials for volunteers will be on hand.
- **Identifying strike tasks,** including communication, security, the instructional plan, special programs, health/first aid and plant maintenance.

Communication, she says, is vital. Parents will want information on a wide variety of subjects, including opening and dismissal times, the qualifications of substitute teachers, how long the strike may last, special programs in operation, attendance credit, grading, safety, health services, food services, and extracurricular programs.

Kirvin recommends periodic letters to parents as well as a daily school bulletin for staff and students.

Also extremely important she says, is proper planning for instructional materials and substitute personnel. The school must have sufficient books, films, manuals, workbooks, curriculum guides, grade books and lesson plans. And assignment procedure for substitute personnel must be worked out well ahead of time.

Communication to substitutes, she says, should include school priorities, a map of the school plant, emergency procedures, daily schedule, roll sheet, seating chart, and school standards and procedures for the instructional materials center, cafeteria, playground, inclement weather, grading and homework.

Communication during a strike, Kirvin counsels, should involve frequent classroom visits, calls and personal notes to parents, returning telephone calls, serving as a model to staff and students, answering students' questions, communicating with the parent organizations, the district office and colleagues, and the expression of appreciation and concern to each teacher each day.

Ann Barkelew, addressing a session of the National Association of Secondary School Principals, reminded them that "strikes and strike build-ups are won or lost in the arena of public opinion—in the ability of one side or the other to convince the community their position is right.

Major Responsibilities for Principals

- Stick to the facts—nothing more.
- Remember it is an organizational stand—don't take what's happening personally.
- Have a letter prepared and ready to be sent to parents, giving them the particulars of how your school will operate. Cite appropriate laws.
- Know how you will deal with the press.
- Be knowledgeable about the budget.
- Define your management responsibilities . . . develop a checklist for the operation of your school . . . determine your staffing needs . . . clarify methods for supervision of students . . . list staff communication procedures . . . develop emergency plans.
- Be prepared to support staff who stay on the job.
- Be aware of how those on strike will be organized.
- Know how you will handle student demonstrations.
- Begin early to function as a management "family"—supportive of each other, no leaks, no undermining.
- Begin early to keep student leaders informed.
- Know how you will keep your site team of administrators updated and knowledgeable.
- Make plans to organize community support groups.
- Have parent volunteers ready to assist.
- Make classroom visitations your way of life.
- Know the importance of being on a regular day's program—even if all you are able to offer are the basics.
- Have bulletins and posters ready to tell students where to report, etc. Students must feel you have the situation under control.
- Plan how to take attendance . . . centralized for roll call.
- Consider having an assembly for students the first day of the strike—to explain procedures.
- Plan ways to keep morale high of regular staff and subs. Let people know they are appreciated.
- Be prepared to set up a phone tree for teachers to give support to those who are called and threatened. It is important for those who are "in" to feel administrative support.
- Make those students who came to school know it will count—give grades, etc.
- Have a "secure" parking area.
- Stay cohesive and present a unified stand. Keep your differences behind closed doors.
- Telephone homes of students who are absent. Reassure parents and ask them to send youngsters to school.

20 Tips for Communication Before and During a Strike*

1. Make communication an integral part of negotiations and strike planning.
2. Establish communications procedures with the board, administration and at the building level early to avoid premature public negotiation of the issues.
3. Make the public relations specialist a member of the superintendent's executive strike committee and be sure that person is involved in the process from the time negotiations begin.
4. Determine who will speak for the district.
5. Meet with a phone company representative to arrange for installing unlisted phones in a central communication center and in principals' offices 30 days prior to the anticipated receipt of a strike notice.
6. Update media lists and other district mailing lists; order or prepare extra sets of mailing lists.
7. Prepare a media packet including a summary of negotiations to date, strike procedures and a list of district people who can be reached for information and where they can be reached day and night.
8. Deliver packets to media representatives in person. Find out who will be assigned to cover the strike, check on deadlines and news room phone numbers (especially for "after hours").
9. Prepare drafts of letters to employees, parents and vendors to be sent when strike notice is received.
10. Check again to be sure all mailing labels are ready and assign a person to handle mailing.
11. Be prepared to be on call 24-hours a day.
12. Anticipate strike activities and prepare information in advance whenever possible.
13. Keep all information released by the district factual.
14. Make the communication center the reliable source of information about all strike-related activities.
15. Make sure media has immediate access to district spokespeople at all times.
16. Cover activities "on-the-scene" whenever possible. This gives better credibility with news media.
17. Be sure news releases and rumor control information are kept up-to-date and readily available.
18. Give district switchboard operators and all secretaries who respond to public calls copies of releases and information so that they can correct rumors.
19. Mail written communications on schedule.
20. Use a code-a-phone or other answering device when switchboard is closed to keep community informed.

*Jeanne R. Magmer, ASPR, community/information services coordinator, David Douglas School District, Portland, Oregon.

The Media

The media will want to know anything and everything that is happening at the negotiation table and in and out of the district during a strike. The side that makes it easier for them to do their jobs will reap the benefits of full and objective reporting. Some suggestions:

- Brief the media fully on every point that is at issue across the bargaining table including statistics, philosophy, reasons for your positions on the issues and the school district's total financial situation.
- Distribute copies of the exhibits you have introduced at the negotiations including wage and class size comparisons with other similar school districts, etc.
- Let them know everything that isn't strictly confidential at the moment.
- Provide statistical data on the impact of inflation on school district budgets, salary increases provided in the past and what they mean in "real" dollars, impact of loss of federal dollars and costs of federally mandated programs.
- Invite the media into your caucuses from time to time. Have them get to know the entire negotiating team personally. Answer their questions about new positions and/or issues.
- Have a PR specialist available at all times to work with the media while the negotiating team is negotiating. The specialist should be as up-to-date on the issues as members of the negotiating team are.

The key to working with the media during a strike is to take them into your confidence as much as possible without tipping bargaining strategies or strictly confidential information. Offer the tons of paper work you are handling to the reporters, too. Good ones will read through it and become as informed as any member of your staff on the issues at hand. This will result in full as well as fair reporting.

Conversely, the more you keep the media in the dark as to your bargaining positions and your reasons for them, the more reporters will go to the union for their information.

And this means more union information instead of yours, will find its way into print, over the air waves, and onto the TV screen. The union will have won the advantage...

Chapter 6

After the Strike

The only thing all strikes have in common is that one day they will end. And then begins perhaps the most critical task of all: gluing it all back together again.

It is rarely an easy task.

The emotions usually are high. The scars, more often than not, are deep. An attitude of retribution is commonplace. The community is upset. The education team is, to say the least, in disarray.

Yet, the job can and must be done.

And there are several general tenets that apply to the task of picking up the pieces after a strike.

One is that planning for what to do at the end of the strike should begin on the day the strike starts.

For instance, every time the superintendent, or a board member, or a principal, resists the urge to indulge in invective, to hurl a charge, to point an accusing finger, he or she is laying the groundwork for restoring human relationships when the strike is over.

Every time any administrator resists the temptation to reply in kind to an angry, frustrated parent, he or she is smoothing the way for harmonious community relations after the strike is over.

In short, the groundwork for a reconciliation of the education team after the strike is laid during the strike. If an administration waits until the strike is over to try to determine what to do, the separation will almost certainly be a long and difficult one.

Another tenet that applies is that true spirit of reconciliation after the strike must be promoted by the superintendent, adopted by the board of education and practiced by the entire management team.

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With the parents assessing very critically just what kind of professionals are in charge of educating their children, and with the students depending on the education team to get back to the job of education, there can be no good guys and bad guys after a strike.

There can only be a committed group of professional educators dedicated, no matter their personal feelings, to putting the school system back together again.

Anything less denigrates the entire profession of education.

Specifically, there are many things a school district can do to help the return to normalcy after a strike.

Ann Barkelew proposes 12 basic rules for recovery after a strike, with a warning that "they're easy to give, but sometimes very difficult to implement."

1. Forget the past. It's water under the dam. Concentrate on the present and future. Don't rehash. Rule out classroom discussions of the strike. Likewise, avoid strike discussions in faculty meetings. Concentrate on instructional strategies for making up lost time.

It may not be easy to keep the subject out of the classroom, Barkelew says, "because kids have a lot of questions. They'll want to know, 'Why did you go out?'" Yet, she counsels, to start rehashing the issues all over again with the students is counterproductive to the task at hand. Administration must be "very clear," she says, in emphasizing this aspect of post-strike operations.

Outside the classroom, teachers, administrators and board members should "stick to the facts" when they're asked to comment on the strike and its issues. Editorial comment, prejudicial viewpoints and the like only tend to open old wounds and make recovery just that much more difficult.

"Forgive and forget. Try to revitalize the feeling of professionalism on the part of teachers. Find ways to get the feeling of professionalism up front again."

2. Forget post-strike social events and get-togethers for a while. Experience shows that most of the time they'll only rekindle strike animosities. A school board that holds a "welcome back" event is simply asking for trouble and may very well wind up prolonging rather than shortening, the recovery period.

Instead, Barkelew says, "stay very businesslike and very intent on programs for kids.

"Don't," she cautions, "pull something special together, thinking you're going to get everyone to kiss and make up by having a big social event. It will never work. Districts that have tried it have found that it's an absolute disaster."

One time, she says, after a strike in a district in Los Angeles County, the school board held a champagne reception for teachers at a country club after a strike. Seven people showed up.

3. A spirit of reconciliation must be adopted and promulgated by the board, the superintendent and the entire administrative team. Anything that discriminates has to be rooted out and destroyed.

Barkelew suggests a strong no-reprisal resolution by the board as a first step, to be printed and distributed widely to all employees and students as well. (See Appendix A)

The next step in the reconciliation effort, she says, is avoiding any favoritism to employees who did not strike. And, above all, "don't try to punish any employees or teach them a lesson." After the strike, everyone is equal, no matter his or her role in the strike. Any other course is counterproductive to reestablishing a climate of human trust, mutual respect and understanding.

4. Schedule principal workshops on interpersonal relations. Consider hiring a psychologist to conduct the workshop.

Bitterness, Barkelew says, is an inescapable byproduct of a strike, even among the most even-tempered professionals. Somehow, the emotions of a strike run deep and afterward, bitterness prevails. As in any individual case of a breakdown in human understanding, sometimes professional help is necessary to restore good faith interpersonal communication.

Administrators must realize, she says, that one of the principal weapons of teacher organizations during a strike is antagonism, "to keep things stirred up," and the natural reaction to antagonism is retribution.

One superintendent she worked with, Barkelew said, admitted that he never would have made it, human relations-wise, after a particularly bitter strike, if it weren't for the fact that "every time I looked around, there was that psychologist saying, 'smile!' "

5. Maintain, at all costs, a positive attitude. Be friendly, warm and sincere and be contagious with it. Smile a lot, even if you don't have a psychologist.

"I realize that may sound phony to some people," Barkelew says, "but it's really important, because body language says a whole lot more than words ever will. If a superintendent walks into a school where the majority of the teachers were out on strike, and he acts just a little bit aloof, then the body language signal is, 'he's still mad.' "

A superintendent, Barkelew says, should demonstrate his or her positive attitude by visiting classrooms. "It doesn't matter," she counsels, "if you miss reports that are due or if you feel you really should be somewhere else, the most important place for the superintendent to be after a strike is out in the schools. That's where the pieces are put back together again. Not, in the district office."

6. Disseminate the terms of the settlement widely, with briefings for the management team, instantly, if not sooner. The minute you get a settlement, call your administrators in. If it's at night, call them in at 7 a.m. If it's during the day, call them in immediately. Brief them thoroughly on the terms of the settlement.

"The reason for this," Barkelew says, "is that during the strike for the first time, most administrators suddenly feel like they're part of management, and it's a brand new experience. And it's such a positive thing that you don't want to let it drop. So you've got that management team built and you want to keep it together."

Also, it is the principal who must administer the new contract, and if he or she has to hear what's in it from the teachers, or from the media, contract implementation already has begun to break down.

7. Help teachers put their best foot forward. After a strike, Barkelew says, "the image of teachers must be one of being helpful, concerned, professional and dedicated to education."

One ideal example, she says, is the homework hotline originated in Philadelphia and implemented now in many school districts across the country where teachers are available in the evening, via the telephone, to help students and parents with homework problems.

8. Stack the board meeting agenda to make it "pro-instruction." Emphasize instruction. Talk about curriculum. Feature successful educational programs.

"The commonality of any school system," Barkelew says, "whether before a strike or during a strike or after a strike or whatever, is the education of kids. The more you can focus on that, the better."

9. Educate everyone about school finance. "The basic issues at stake in any strike," Barkelew contends, "are money and power."

Strike settlements cost money. More money usually means more taxes. The public must be educated about the costs of quality education. You can't cut budgets and improve the quality of education. Inflation drives up the cost of any product. The ideal time to drive this message home is after a strike settlement, when the public is relieved that the teachers are back in the classrooms. The public must be made aware of the price tag attached.

10. Start a new project. Form a citizens committee. Start a new curriculum study.

"I guess you might call that diverting attention," Barkelew says, "but it's important to get everyone thinking something other than strike." Energies during a strike are directed almost totally to the strike. It is the one overriding issue. After the strike, it's time to channel those energies in new, more positive directions.

11. After a strike, "be very, very consistent in your behavior. It is not the time to set new rules, to issue new, sweeping directives from on high, to crack down on something you've let go for years.

"During strikes," Barkelew says, "lots of districts suddenly are made painfully aware of holes in their policies." If they then start to strengthen and enforce these policies relentlessly after the strike, "all that does is just aggravate the situation. If you're going to clamp down on a teacher who has a dirty classroom, don't do it the week after the strike."

12. Emphasize the importance to the school district of school staff. Not only the superintendent, but cabinet level administrators also should visit schools and classrooms, "being visible and visibly interested in staff, all staff."

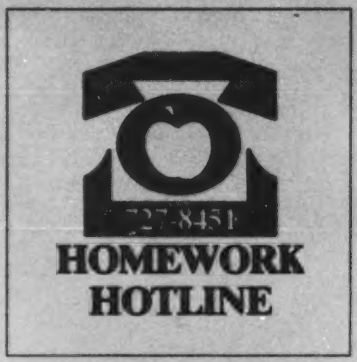
Also, she says, board meetings should include reports on "good things that are happening because of staff and staff involvement in district-wide committees," and actions taken at all board meetings should be reported to staff.

The board and the district's senior management group should "share their pride and enthusiasm about the job staff is doing to make the district a success." It is, she says, "really, really important."

In implementing these rules for recovery after a strike, school districts will find that perhaps the one key figure in the entire scenario is the building principal.

Winston-Salem/Forsyth, N. Ca.

Some teachers in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth (N. Ca.) County Schools saw a public service announcement for the Charlotte/Mecklenburg School System's "Dial-a-Teacher" program and wanted to steal the idea. As members of the Forsyth Association of Classroom Teachers (FACT)—the North Carolina Association of Educators—they suggested the idea to FACT which in turn presented it to district administrators.



Since no funds had been budgeted for such a project, administrators from the division of planning and development went to work with the teachers in a joint effort to find outside funding.

Eight companies contributed a part of the approximately $10,000 budget to pay for the first trial semester. Reynolds Industries committed 25 percent of the total funds. The Public Library donated space and telephones, and the FACT committee helped design and set up the service, trained the teachers, and gave hundreds of hours without compensation.

The service opened January 26, 1981, with four teachers and five telephone lines. (The fifth line is answered by a recording, the next free teacher returns the call.) Two teams of teachers handle the lines: one group on Monday and Wednesday and the other on Tuesday and Thursday. They are paid at an hourly rate based on their certificate rating (though only for three hours a night). Paperwork and returning some calls often keeps them overtime, time which they donate.

Most calls are from students in grades 5–8 though there have been calls from a kindergartner who didn't understand how to color within the lines to a college student stuck on advanced calculus. Some calls come from parents and some from private school students.

Homework Hotline teachers do not give answers. They usually help the students work through the problems until they find the answers, refer them to library resources or explain the directions.

In the first three months the service answered 4,286 calls. The number of calls stabilized after the novelty wore off to about 80–90 a night.

The Homework Hotline, a cooperative effort involving teachers, administrators, business, the library and even students (as volunteer assistants) working together, has had a profound impact on the community, on the students served, and on the image of the classroom teachers whose idea it was in the first place.

The Building Principal

Invariably, the first key movement toward reconciliation will take place at the building level with the guidance and the encouragement of the principal. And that movement will consist primarily of a renewed interest in curriculum and quality education. That is the one common ground for strikers and non-strikers, administrators and teachers alike.

Burbank, California, Principal Caroline C. Kirvin suggests the following step-by-step plan for reconciliation at the building level after the strike:

Six Points for Principals

1. The principal must be consistent in his or her dealings with everyone; no favorites, no good guys or bad guys. Any deviation from total consistency will exacerbate the problems left over from the strike.
2. The principal must focus on support for students, particularly through the instructional program. In all cases, the principal must ask, "What's best for the students?"
3. The principal must be firm in setting limits for acceptable behavior. While the focus should be on reestablishing human relationships and not on retribution or punishment after the strike, inappropriate behavior from teachers or students cannot be tolerated either. Thus, firm ground rules must be laid down for appropriate staff and student behavior, with fair and consistent penalties spelled out for violations.
4. The principal must quickly, fairly and equitably implement the terms of the new contract.
5. The principal must watch for and mediate disputes between parents and teachers and strikers and nonstrikers. While in the latter case teachers can be bound by rules of post-strike conduct, parents cannot. Principals must personally step in, in such cases, and attempt to mitigate the conflict before it threatens post-strike relations with the community.
6. The principal must expect and be ready to deal with bitterness, anger, challenge of authority, complaints, etc. These are commonplace after a strike, particularly after a lengthy strike where little, if anything, was gained.

To deal with this bitterness, principals should individualize their approach with each striker in working toward reconciliation. Positive reinforcement should be used to facilitate the reconciliation process. A principal might want to keep a separate record for each teacher, charting movement toward reconciliation.

In the process, rationale for any kind of anti-social behavior cannot be validated.

And any kind of group therapy, like getting the staff together to discuss the strike and the emotions that remain, will almost certainly be a disaster.

Other actions that have helped principals restore normalcy after a strike include:

- Keeping the principal "off the front lines" during the strike. Strike directives should come from the central office, not the principal. Principals should not take part, or be forced to take part, actively and vocally in supporting the board's positions during the strike. (Naturally, they should not be opposing these positions, either.) When a principal is easily identified by teachers as one of "them" his or her reconstruction job after the strike will be a formidable one.
- Avoiding, totally, the discussion of strike incidents. Assign them to posterity and keep them there. The look at the building level must be forward, not back.
- Holding immediate post-strike in-service sessions for principals both to review with them in detail the new contract and how to implement it fairly and effectively, and to develop strategies for dealing with post-strike problems.
- Distributing board/union agreement on nonreprisals to every employee.
- Eliminating or at least holding to an absolute minimum the number of district-wide meetings that would take principals out of their buildings during school hours.

Many agree that the number one post strike communication need is to explain thoroughly to principals the content of the new contract and to work with them in effecting ways to implement it.

According to AASA, the school district's chief negotiator or someone who understands completely the terms of the settlement, including its spirit, its nuances and administrative rules and regulations accompanying it, should hold a thorough briefing session for building administrators prior to the return of the teachers.

In that way, AASA says, they will have a first-hand understanding of the agreement and will be in a proper position to administer it firmly but fairly.

Unfortunately, AASA says, "the history of post-strike activities in many districts reveals an avalanche of grievances and arbitrations, with the major cause being 'the building administrator's unawareness of the meaning of contract changes.'" This unawareness almost certainly leads to interpretations by the principal that require grievance and arbitration procedures to clarify.

"Information and understanding is the key," says AASA, to a smooth transition from the old contract to the new, and with it the burying of the animosities of a strike.

The Superintendent

One of the first things superintendents must do in a post-strike situation is "to move quickly to meet the deep feelings of guilt, defeat, victory, anger, envy and hate."

And the way to do that, says AASA, is "to refocus differing segments of the educational community from their hard-fought polarized positions to a neutral meeting ground—**the education of children.** Generally, says AASA, the superintendent in a post-strike situation must:

- Anticipate the emotions of all groups
- Foster a climate for educational renewal
- Totally brief all staff on new contract terminology
- Launch a community and teacher involvement program

The latter suggestion can be the catalyst that brings everyone back after the strike.

In the William Penn School District, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, the project was secondary school reorganization—the merging of four secondary schools into three.

The process actually had begun a year before the strike, with teachers being involved from the beginning in designing necessary building renovations and remodeling and in rewriting curriculum necessitated by the shift of students from six boroughs into one senior high school and two junior high schools.

After the strike, the project was resumed in earnest, with the naming of 15 committees, including teachers, administrators, students and community representatives, to study such areas as discipline, school names and colors, student programs, teacher training, community relations and consolidating student governments and parent associations.

For more than a year, according to Community Relations Specialist Phyllis Belk, literally hundreds of persons met several times a month "to discuss, argue, survey and reach agreement on very important, relevant tasks. They were involved in and knowledgeable about big changes in the school district.

"Having this tremendous assignment, and deciding to involve as many people as wanted to be involved, was an unplanned but advantageous process to be going through after a strike," Belk reported.

According to the project coordinator, Deputy Superintendent Philip Esbrandt, "If a district, after a strike, has an opportunity to engage in a project of this magnitude, don't let the fears of a hostile aftermath stop you. Such a project can go a long way toward healing the system."

Board of Education

"Perhaps the most difficult readjustment," according to AASA, "is felt by some school board members whose original high regard for teachers as a professional group has degenerated to enmity, spite and vengeance-to-be-wreaked. Some school board members may never again look with positive feelings on administrative decisions which benefit teachers in any way, whatsoever."

And it is these attitudes which, AASA adds, are "the best argument for a school district to employ a professional negotiator, and thus remove the board member(s) from frustrations of the negotiation table.

Answers will be called for regarding the strike at public board meetings on just what the settlement costs, what effect the strike had on the educational program, what actions are going to be taken against striking teachers, etc.

And calmly and rationally, with facts and figures and with carefully thought-out policy statements, rather than with off-the-cuff personal opinions and emotions, these questions must be answered.

The tone of the response to questions like these will go a long way toward setting the tone of the overall post-strike process. The Ohio School Boards Association sees the post-strike role of a school board as follows:

1. Exert a sincere effort to adopt a "business as usual attitude."
2. Avoid public comment that may reflect negative attitudes toward classes of employees or the association.
3. Be certain that any actions taken or statements made contribute to the improvement of educational opportunity or climate for the students of the district.
4. Hold a meeting with the superintendent and principals and fully critique the pre-strike period, the strike itself and the post-strike period.

Louise Stoll warns that "board members make a mistake if they assume that their duty to communicate to the public ends when the contract is successfully concluded or the strike is over."

Whether the negotiations have been positive and constructive or hostile and negative, she says, "there is still a lot of communicating to be done." She explains:

"If a contract is negotiated in a manner where mutual respect is gained by each party, and the compromise process has been successful, the board's role in communicating can be extremely constructive.

"On the other hand," Stoll says, "after hostile negotiations it is a virtual certainty that the employee organization will attempt to sell whatever resolution is reached as an enormous victory for their positions." Such a stance, she adds, "can be extremely damaging to the image of the board and misleading to the public with regard to the facts involved in the settlement."

One effective way for the board of education to aid in the process of putting the pieces together again after a strike is to jointly adopt a no-reprisal clause with the leadership of the teacher association or union.

While AASA cautions that in drawing up a no-reprisal clause "the district negotiator should be extremely careful in the drafting of such language," the association approves of joint action against reprisals since "unions, like management, do not condone such activities."

In any case, a no-reprisal clause should be communicated as quickly as possible to every employee in the school district and the media. Efforts should continue to put the district family back together again and a communication plan developed at the district and building level to **emphasize the district's commitment to excellence.**

Conclusion

If school labor peace is ever to be achieved—and, realistically, it must be achieved if public education as we know it today is to survive—it will be achieved only through improved communication.

History has shown us that labor peace can be achieved through good faith communication over the bargaining table. Although the economy of the 1980s and the growing resistance of taxpayers to foot the bill for increased teacher salaries do not augur well for peaceful collective bargaining in the public school sector.

It can be achieved, too, through alternatives to collective bargaining, such as the "collective gaining" process in Forest Park, Illinois, and the "integrative bargaining" process in Livermore, California, as described in this publication. Both processes, which are also beginning to take hold in the private sector, rely on sincere communication between two parties for the good, and perhaps survival of the entity they both represent.

It can even be achieved, for the future, in the midst of a teacher strike, if both sides can communicate openly, honestly, rationally and effectively.

And it can be achieved after the strike through communication and cooperation between labor and management aimed, in good faith, at preserving the dignity and the professionalism of the education establishment.

But when communication breaks down, as it all too often does, labor peace cannot be achieved.

And when that is the case, as it all too often is, the very foundation of free public education in this country for people of all races, classes and religions crumbles just a little bit more.

The future, then, of that foundation, and of the future of the industry it upholds, depends, to a considerable degree, upon communication between traditional foes; upon how the school districts of this nation and the teachers they employ communicate in the difficult years ahead.

Public education in this country is at a communication crossroads.

One road leads to continued strife within the education family; to continued fragmentation of the education team; to the withdrawal of community support; to vouchers, to tuition tax credits; to a future that is, at best, uncertain.

The other road leads to labor peace; to conciliation; to factions within the industry of public education fighting less and communicating more; to a preservation of what Thomas Jefferson called the cornerstone of democracy that allowed anyone, of any class, to rise, through a free public education, to the top.

The outcome?

Only the future will tell.

Epilogue

Despite a depressed economy, high unemployment and the recent increase in the sales tax, voters in Washington state approved school levies by margins ranging from 75 percent to more than 85 percent during the first week of February 1982.

The overwhelming "yes" votes surprised even the most optimistic Washington school supporters and sent a wave of hope across the nation.

A total of 123 of the state's 300 school districts had placed levies and bond issues totaling $338.4 million on the ballot. Only 16 were turned down.

"They may be out of work, but they want their kids to do better than they did," observed Frank B. Brouillet, state superintendent of public instruction.

Belinda Pearson, economist for the Seattle-First National Bank, said, "People believe in investing in the future. That's a very encouraging response."

"Though times are economically depressed, people still want something better for their kids," agreed Richard B. Voege, superintendent at Aberdeen in the heart of the state's depressed forest products industry, where unemployment is running as high as 20 percent.

The state's legislature, which has been cutting back on state services, including education, should heed the message from back home, said an editorial in the *Seattle Times*. "There is strong political support for proper funding of our public schools," the newspaper said.

But not only the Washington legislature should heed the message delivered at the polls in Washington. For the victory has another message, one critically important for school administrators and staff. That message, according to Jo Love Beach, director of personnel/public information for Everett (Wa.) School District #2 is:

"The victory at the polls in Everett, where voters approved a two-year levy with the largest vote in history, was a victory of administrators and teachers working together with parents and members of the community in a planned, year-round communication effort to support schools."

And the victory in Everett came after two teacher strikes. And it came through the full cooperation and intensive campaign efforts of district teachers, administrators, parents and community leaders. In Everett, administrators and board members make a point of never bad-mouthing their teachers during a strike, according to Beach. Rather, they make a point to stress the high quality of the district teaching staff while clearly assigning labor problems to the union bargaining process. The result is a team spirit—ready and willing to work together once the strike settlement is reached.

Appendix A

Superintendents Bulletin

Resolution of No Reprisals for Teachers Participating in the Strike or for Refusing to Participate

WHEREAS, the BTA/CTA/NEA has called and conducted a strike against this District beginning March 27, 1980 and ending April 23, 1980, and

WHEREAS, the District wishes to insure the return of the striking teachers without fear of reprisals for striking; and

WHEREAS, the District wishes to insure that teachers who did not participate in the strike shall be free of reprisals for not participating in the strike; and

WHEREAS, the District wishes a speedy return to a quality relationship between the District and all its employees and among its various employees after a settlement of the strike;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that no certificated employee of the District will have reprisals imposed or in any manner be disciplined, coerced, threatened or discriminated against for refusing to participate in or for participating in the strike called and conducted by the BTA. Specifically excluded from these provisions are acts which are proved by the preponderance of evidence in an adversary proceeding to be acts of violence, assault and battery, or proved criminal acts, and in addition any action taken by the BTA/CTA/NEA which resulted in property damage. Such incidents will be processed through the appropriate legal channels with full guarantees of due process of law.

This Resolution will be maintained without modification to June 30, 1981.

Burbank (Calif.) USD